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ABSTRACT

Research on girls' development has found that girls see the world that coheres through human relationships rather than through systems of rules, and that 12 or 13 is a watershed age for girls, a time of "central relational crisis." As their bodies enter the physiological transformations that culminate in womanhood, they face an onslaught of social pressures: norms, expectations, and sanctions related to what it means to be feminine in our culture. Reacting to this change in their relational environment, girls go through a process of silencing their inner voice and projecting an outward self that conforms to society's expectations. Eventually the developing girl forgets her internal voice. The Connecting with Courage (CWC) program is an Outward Bound course that helps girls aged 12-13 to amplify rather than stifle their personal voices. CWC nurtures girls' courage in the sense that courage is associated with personal integrity within one's self and one's relationships. Two critical elements in the program's enormous success are that it combines artistic and creative activities with more traditional adventure elements, and that instructors become role models by developing relationships with the girls and showing them through example that they can speak out, question convention, and engage assertively in relationships. The course has spawned similar courses for adult women, mothers and daughters, and classroom teachers. Strong, fully developed women's voices are needed to fuel the paradigm shift away from Western patriarchal culture. (TD)

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"Connecting with Courage," An Outward Bound Program for Adolescent Girls

Terry Porter

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I remember that bright January day and the blustery ferry ride in Boston Harbor. Gulls circled around us, the deck swayed beneath my unfamiliar feet, and the bitter wind caught me full in the face. I ducked into the warmer cabin to look for an unobtrusive seat, but there were none; on the in-town subway, I might be invisible, but for that short boat ride, there is only one destination.

Thompson Island is just ten minutes from Boston. It is also home of one of the few urban-based Outward Bound schools in the country. While these facts might add up to an oxymoron for some purists, the staff there prefer to think of them as a challenge and an uncommon opportunity. My purpose on that trip was to learn more about one of their many innovative programs, Connecting with Courage (CWC), through meeting with Program Director Amy Kohut.

As a result of meetings with Amy, conversations with both staff and participants, and my own reading and research, I came to learn that Connecting with Courage is a remarkable program, certainly a significant one in the evolution of experiential education for girls and women. Not only is it the first Outward Bound course to be specifically designed for 12- and 13-year-old girls, but that it is based on still-controversial research about the specific developmental needs of this age group is also significant. In this chapter, a summary of the relevant research precedes a description of the program itself; following these are discussions of offshoots of the original program at Thompson Island and of related issues concerning future directions in the field.

Research Findings

The research that informs Connecting with Courage began with psychologist Carol Gilligan's 1982 publication of *In a Different Voice*. Noting that the major studies and theories of moral development in our Western culture were based on male

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subjects only, she set out to investigate girls' and women's developmental perspectives. One thing she learned was that the passage through puberty into adolescence was concurrent with a profound shift in the way girls described themselves and their world.

As this 12- to 13-year-old age group had never been systematically studied before, Gilligan, Dr. Annie Rogers, and other researchers at the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development focused largely on this population, empirically tracing the nature of the adolescent journey for females. To do so, they developed methods of listening that enabled them to delineate different voices within any individual speaker. They also found it necessary to confront their personal histories of adolescent transformation as well. To read their studies is an eye-opening experience, both in terms of a new understanding of women's development in our androcentric American culture and in respect gained for the personal growth the researchers experienced in their process.

When tapes of interviews with many girls were analyzed, the researchers found that "girls watch the human world like people watch the weather" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 3). Much more attuned to people than they are to objects and accomplishments, girls see "a world comprised of relationships rather than of people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 29). Where standing theories of moral development placed relational knowing and connectedness as antecedent to a higher plane where ideals and rules of conduct had greater value, new evidence led to the conclusion that there could be both different pathways to maturity and different concepts of maturity itself. Thus, a system where relationships are key to knowing and acting in the world is no less valid than one derived from abstract concepts of justice.

The researchers also learned that 12 or 13 is a watershed age for girls, a time of "central relational crisis" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 184). Prior to this time, girls are assertive and self-empowered, unafraid to vociferously make their views known. But as their bodies enter the physiological transformations that inevitably culminate in womanhood, their psychological identities undergo dramatic shifts as well. Suddenly there is an onslaught of intense social pressure consisting of norms, expectations, and sanctions about what it means to be feminine in our culture. Reacting to this change in their relational environment, girls go through a process of self-silencing that the researchers have been able to systematically describe.

The first sign of this process is a marked increase in a girl's confusion about what she knows and is willing to discuss. Her speech becomes tentative, often punctuated with disclaimers like, "I don't know" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Rogers, 1993). The world suddenly becomes shaky and unsafe at this stage; girls can be seen visibly withdrawing from authenticity in their relationships.

In the next stage, the adolescent girl outwardly adjusts to adhere to social convention but is able to maintain her awareness of doing so. She "finds that she can protect herself by thinking one thing and saying another, by doubling her voice,

being in a sense, two people—one private and honest, one public and acceptable" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 112). A girl might act demure, for example, withholding her opinion in class, when in fact, she has strong thoughts on a certain matter.

While this strategy works for a time, eventually it slips over into what Rogers (1993) has called psychological "resistance," or the dissociation of the experience from awareness. With the passage of time and repeated reinforcement of only the outward personality, the developing girl gradually forgets her internal voice. She becomes to herself the mask she was trying to project. Unfortunately, there is a double tragedy here. Not only is there the loss of a valuable voice to public life, but there is also the private risk of serious psychological problems—either in adolescence or later on in adulthood—as the repressed dissonance between her inner and outer voices festers within (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

The conclusion of the researchers was that it is next to impossible for a girl of 12 or 13 in this culture to maintain congruence between her inner self and her outer relationships as she moves through adolescence. An overwhelming tide of cultural pressure bears down on her, precisely at a time when she is young, inexperienced, and quite vulnerable. Here then was the challenge for the founders of Thompson Island's Connecting with Courage program: to create an Outward Bound course that would help girls counteract the compromises in relationships that their experience as girls requires, a setting to help them amplify rather than stifle their personal voices.

Connecting with Courage for Girls

Connecting with Courage was birthed in 1992 by Joanne Stemmerman and Helen Fouhey, experiential educators with extensive experience in the field. Some of what makes their vision unique is visible on the surface. Other Outward Bound courses don't accept students under the age of 14, for example, while CWC is designed expressly for 12- and 13-year-olds. And, unlike most other courses where friends are deliberately placed in separate patrols or courses, friends are welcome to do the course together.

The 14-day course length is also shorter than the standard for Outward Bound but much longer than any other courses on Thompson Island, which typically run from one to four days. "I didn't set the length," says Kohut, "but it works. Part of it is the Outward Bound concept of stress—doing a lot of different elements and being able to sink into each element . . . and the longer time you have with the kids, the more the impact of the program will be."

CWC takes much from the Outward Bound style of expeditionary learning. "It's an opportunity to step away from regular life and be introspective," says Betsy Gillespie, another Thompson Island staff member, "and I think Outward Bound facilitates that very well." The good name of Outward Bound has also been a boon.

"The Outward Bound name helps tremendously," according to Kohut. "It gets us in the door, gets us recognized in a positive way with people."

To explore the ways that Connecting with Courage departs from its predecessors, it is helpful to start with its name. In her research, Rogers learned that "in 1300 one definition of courage was 'to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart' . . . the definition of courage drew speaking into relation with mind and heart, intellect and love" (Rogers, 1993, p. 271). Once upon a time, in other words, courage was a quality concerned with personal integrity, both within one's self and in one's relationships.

The modern connotation of valor and bravery in one's conquests—and its application to most adventure programming—is a more recent overlay to this definition. As Kohut explained:

> Lots of high adventure literature is written with conquering words and what feels like masculine language: "conquer the mountain, conquer your own fears, probe your inner desires," lots of wording like that. It's not heart-centered, not relation-centered. . . . We honor the belief that girls are relationship based and we value that within the course. . . . The overall goal is to let them know that we really value who they are; whether we like what they say or not, we just want them to say what they feel and think. (Kohut, 1994)

The challenge in designing CWC was to nurture girls' courage in the earlier sense of the word.

Credit for successful methods of achieving this end go back to the researchers, as Betsy Gillespie explained: "Outward Bound to a great extent has had research follow, and with this program the research is preceding what we're doing" (Gillespie, 1994). Among others, Dr. Annie Rogers has explored and written about what it takes to create "a safe, playful and challenging relational context among women or women and girls together" (Rogers, 1994). She has described two critical ingredients for success.

The first involves using an artistic approach. This was accomplished at Thompson Island by combining traditional course elements with creative initiatives. Woven in with rock climbing, sailing, backpacking, and the ropes course, for example, are activities such as drama, journal writing, drawing, and painting. As Kohut explains: "On the backpacking element in New Hampshire, they'll make friendship bracelets with a commitment to each other for the goals of the course. Or they'll do a group mural one night at the campsite. It all kind of goes hand in hand." Use of the arts brings the girls into relation with each other and encourages them to express their inner selves in uninhibited ways.

The second aspect lies in role modeling, or the instructor's use of herself:

> To invite a girl to reveal herself in my presence, I have found it necessary to make an opening for her courage through mine, revealing myself as someone who struggles as she struggles, breaking conventions of standard

Photo courtesy of Amy Kohut

teaching, research and clinical practice to do so. . . . To learn this practice of courage . . . we need time and space to breathe freely, to be vulnerable, to speak honestly with one another. . . . It also means breaking traditional and time-honored conventions of feminine goodness to create a new order or logic of relationships between women and girls. (Rogers, 1993, p. 291)

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Kohut is acutely aware of the value of her excellent staff: "It's a very powerful program to work in staff-wise—the research is very meaningful to them and they are really committed to making it happen and they're incredible."

For each staff member then, it is important to develop relationships with the girls and show them through example that it is okay to speak out, to be playful in questioning convention, and to engage assertively in relationships. As an example, one instructor described her approach: "To go in on the first day of the course and give a lecture about advantages and disadvantages of being a woman—it's not going to fly. But we did it casually over dinner, a few nights into the course."

Connecting with Courage has achieved phenomenal success in its first years of service. For the three years since its inception, demand and numbers of courses offered have risen exponentially. All the more remarkable is the perspective that this is a radical program in many ways. It is a program for females—historically only just over 20% of Thompson Island's enrollment—at an age that has traditionally been considered too young for Outward Bound. It also depends largely on donations, since one of Kohut's goals is to have 50% of the students on some form of scholarship. But in funding for single-gender programs in the Boston area, only 6% of all monies go to girls' programs, the other 94% to programs for boys (Kohut, 1994).

But statistics don't tell the whole story. "I don't think I could really explain how much I like it," said one graduate of the course. "They put a lot of responsibility on you . . . a lot was expected of you. It made you feel really good about yourself, like you could handle this and they were entrusting you with this." The rapid growth of this program is proof that it meets important personal needs while breaking tradition on many levels to do so.

Offshoot Programs

With the success of the girls' courses, the Thompson Island staff wondered about involving adult women in the Connecting with Courage programs. Perhaps adults would also find meaning in the opportunity to connect with themselves and each other through physical challenge and creative expression.

Kohut and her cohorts started with a women's "Invitational," in the summer of 1993, a 3-day program to which they invited a number of women philanthropists and leaders. Following a very positive response, they decided to try several open enrollment weekend courses for women. From just one advertisement in the Boston papers they received over 800 phone calls. "We have totally found a niche and a need," says Kohut. "The response has been tremendous."

Though the women's course is shorter, it is very powerful for the participants. The women use the ropes course and go rock climbing or sailing, camp on the island, and do a mini-solo on their final day. Along with other activities designed to develop trust and encourage sharing, they are also asked to bring a picture of themselves at age 12 or 13. The alchemy of these ingredients is a very exciting weekend

where women often make deep connections with themselves and each other. As one instructor put it, ". . . in that short amount of time we've been able to move women to a point where they feel emotionally comfortable . . . my experience in the discussions has been watching a flood of talk."

One participant in the adult course described her experience:

> I was really quite shocked at some of the things I discovered about myself, some things I hadn't been able to put into place. . . . There was a time when I gave up organized sports and had no idea why . . . and I was able to get in touch with that and it was unbelievable.

This description sounds very much like the psychological resistance or self-forgetting process that the researchers have explained. This same woman also had a transforming experience of empowerment on the ropes course:

> I knew it would take a lot to get control and do it, as I was shaking up there, but the sense of "I can do it if I really put my mind to it, or I can fall off and no one's really going to care," is exactly like what it's like at work.

The course helped her literally to remember experiences that she had forgotten, and also gave her valuable support in her current life.

Beyond the women's courses, Thompson Island is experimenting with this material in other ways. "We're building on the connection between women and girls," says Gillespie, "making women more aware of the role that they need to be playing with girls." To this end, they have created courses for mothers and daughters and for classroom teachers—as part of their mission is to make links with the educational system as well.

They have also started a CWC Advisory Council, comprised of girls' and women's course graduates, program staff, and women leaders from the larger Boston community. "What we are doing is saying to girls who have finished the course, 'Your role is to stay involved now; we are inviting you onto the Advisory Council and you will have equal say,'" explains Gillespie. Significantly, the CWC team has gone beyond strict boundaries to build alliances, create new networks, and join with others who are working to empower girls and women through experiential and other modalities.

Conclusion

In this last section, I want to reverse the lens for a moment and take a wide-angle view of Connecting with Courage and women's experiential education in today's landscape.

Perhaps every generation feels itself to be living in a pivotal time, and certainly no less is true for us. We seem to be at a crossroads, where staggering issues of overpopulation, ecological peril, dwindling resources, and social injustice threaten

survival, of both our species and our planet. There is also the growing awareness that traditional approaches to problem solving will not work anymore: that what's needed are courageous perspectives and radical paradigm shifts. We are challenged to respond from our hearts and our minds, and in so doing, to reinvent the meaning of responsibility.

Open minded innovators are often finding that they have much in common. Breakthroughs in one area can have relevance elsewhere. This is the stuff of synergy; it offers new outlets for our hope and efforts. I believe that Connecting with Courage is a case in point.

The fact of patriarchy—the cultural hierarchy of men over women that has been in place for an estimated five millennia—has been investigated from many directions in recent years. Feminist thinkers and researchers, both women and men, have established a clear link between our Western patriarchal culture and the unconscious internalization of oppression in individuals:

> As a form of social control, internalization is definitely a long-range strategy. . . . Our conditioning . . . trains us to conform and to assume [patriarchal] values as our own. Given no alternatives, domination and subordination becomes our reality, our universe. . . . We are not consciously aware of making a choice to follow patriarchal values, but we do—of our own volition—choose them. We are not aware of other options, and we are not aware of our own volition. (Hagan, 1993, pp. 85-87)

Others in the field of addictions recovery have approached the same phenomena from a different direction. These days, the term codependency has become a cliché, but its definition sounds very much like the preceding political analysis:

> Codependency is a woman's basic training. That is, in order to be acceptable in the male system a woman is taught to set aside her knowledge, her hopes, her dreams and her power by playing the role of wife, secretary . . . and so on. (Kasl, 1992, p. 39)

Both views describe behavior learned in response to cultural pressure, and the point is made that the learning itself is forgotten once the behavior is ingrained.

If codependency is synonymous with internalized oppression, then the research done by Gilligan, Rogers, and their colleagues seems to document an important way in which this adaptation takes place. In their analysis of the enculturation process that happens to girls at puberty, they have shown us how girls adapt by taking themselves out of an authentic relationship with their own self. This self-silencing amounts to cultural shaping for a subordinate role in patriarchy.

Connecting with Courage was developed as an antidote to the pressure on girls to conform at this age. As such, it is a political program, or at the very least, a program with political implications. It is political because the strong, impassioned, even outraged voices of women are exactly what's needed to fuel the paradigm shifts

needed today. Though Kohut is quick to credit other programs with doing similar work in the experiential field, CWC stands out nonetheless. It makes a deliberate link between psychological research and adventure education, and it has also created opportunities for graduates to remain meaningfully involved in ongoing processes of change.

As experiential educators, we are challenged by this example to stay conscious about our ethics and our politics. We can recognize the fact that the work we do has embedded cultural values, and we can make careful choices about how we model and reinforce those values in our work. If we pretend that our field is isolated from other realms of culture, we may be losing valuable opportunities for effectiveness in our work and in our lives. Our choices then remain unconscious, though we will be making them nonetheless.

As the pace of change in our world continues to accelerate, I believe that experiential education will become a more and more powerful tool for helping people change. This is precisely because it overlaps disciplines and impacts us on many levels simultaneously. Our opportunity as experiential educators is to take the lead in much-needed paradigm changes, rather than to be oblivious to them. The challenge is twofold: to become fluent with the experiential tools at our disposal—both their potentials and their ethical uses—and second, to work hard to know and develop ourselves fully, not just as outdoorswomen, but as potential agents of cultural change as well.

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